

## HOW MY FATHER WAS CONVERTED

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By Rev. Mother María Concepcion Zuniga Lopez

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"Come to me, all of you." (Mt. 11:29)

I was very young when my mother, reciting the holy rosary in union with her two daughters—I was one of them—made us suspend its recitation brusquely with a call to attention: "Quiet, here comes your father." The scene was repeated many times, until moved by curiosity, and not without a certain fear, I asked why we would suspend our prayers whenever the head of the house arrived. I did not get an answer that satisfied me, but some years later I was able to convince myself that my father hated our religion, all religion. I knew how, poisoned by friends and perverse readings, since his youth he had lived estranged from God.

Nevertheless, Juan Zuniga Hermosillo—as my father was named—was gifted with great natural virtues: perfectly honest, courteous, generous, valiant, charitable, and excellent friend, father and a most loving husband even in the midst of the uprisings, unfortunately frequent, of his choleric character. His great capacity for work and his undeniable intellectual gifts led him to occupy a very outstanding position in the state of Jalisco, where he lived the greater part of his life, surrounded by the respect and affection of all social classes.

Unfortunately, as was noted above, in what related to religious matters, he had lamentable defects. After having lost his faith, he had been obstinate in closing his mind to light, refusing to study, to discuss, and even to listen to reasons and arguments. A prey to an obtuse rationalism, he boasted of the position he had adopted. Nevertheless, in the midst of his incredulity, he maintained a disconcerting feature of piety: an extraordinary respect for everything related to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Even when he spoke out inconsiderately against the faith, on mentioning the name of the Mother of God he would say: "There, let us keep silent." All his life he kept a picture of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, for whom he felt special veneration.

On the other hand, I must add that my mother was reducing her religion to certain pious practices, eventually realized mechanically. I remember that she was apt to say: "As for priests, hear their masses and let them be." My sister, influenced by the environment in which she was living, also was a long way from being a fervent Catholic.

What a deep void reigned in my home! I experienced it from childhood and even came to suffer, in a transient form, by chance, its terrible moral influence: without having been instructed in religion and listening often to diatribes against it, I was at the point of sinking into the chaos of doubt! But God had compassion on me. The call to faith was reborn in my soul; I felt myself inflamed by divine things, and I began to seek my Creator in the intimate silence of prayer. My family was so far from understanding me that it was necessary for me to leave them in the dark concerning the sweet anxieties and longings that seethed in my spirit.

Sometime later, for the purpose of following the religious vocation to which I felt myself called, I had to leave my house furtively to enter a convent. I succeeded in being hidden only two years, at the end of which my father obliged me to return home, granting that I might live isolated from the

world—but at his side. Each day I prayed with more fervour to obtain the conversion of my father, and so my mother might draw closer to God. From a human point of view, the battle was unequal. I did not have the least influence on them, and the three beings whom I loved most in life formed a united front against which it seemed all my efforts would be crushed. With respect to this, I can affirm that God permitted my confidence in Him to be put to the test in the midst of most difficult perils, for in the measure that I implored more and more the conversion of my father, so there arose in his spirit reactions of hate that impelled him to act like one truly possessed. On a certain occasion I dared, perhaps moved by an imprudent zeal, to place some little crosses of blessed palm in all the rooms of the house, including my father's bedroom. The following morning, I found that he had flung them on the floor, and seized by an insane rage, he reprimanded me severely, to the point of threatening me with I don't know what reprisals.

God responded to the outrage with an eloquent and terrible warning. In the afternoon of that same day, while the family was at the table after dinner, from a sky clear of clouds an electric discharge bolted, that terrified us with its most horrible clamour. The thunderbolt, piercing the roof, had fallen on my father's bed, precisely on the pillow on his bed. When my father saw what had happened, with a voice filled with emotion he muttered: "Daughter, you can put your little crosses in my room!"

A little later Divine Providence wished to inflict on the rebellious one a most painful humiliation. Accustomed to success in all his commercial enterprises, he saw the fortune amassed at a price of work and sacrifice decline. All his businesses began to crumble, and he felt disconcerted and impotent. In this epoch, how many times I heard him ask me, feigning calmness, to beg God to help him get out of his difficulties.

But when it seemed that the light of faith was going to illuminate his soul, diabolical reactions of despair and of hate surged from his interior; he smashed religious images, on the sole pretext of their having been placed in his room or in his office; he flung to the floor and trampled upon the relics I had placed in his coat or in his hat; truly he seemed to be possessed by the devil! It is fitting to add here that, by this time, my mother as well as my sister had been converted to fervent and practicing Catholics, for they united their prayers to mine.

On another occasion, my father was present at the last moments of a young god-child of his whom he loved a great deal, who had a truly exemplary and edifying Christian death. The emotion that overcame my father was so great that he was at the point of submitting to the power of grace, that was calling him so persistently. Nevertheless, when the influence of the first impression passed, when we returned home, enraged at having yielded to that environment of "bigotry," he let himself go once again in atrocious blasphemies, protesting that he would never abandon his ideas.

God, in his infinite mercy, offered him a new humiliation. After having occupied for many years' posts of great influence in local politics and having made himself loved and respected by all those he governed, he retired to private life. A little while later he found himself harassed by the rancour of his political enemies who wounded him and provoked him continuously, humiliating him to the point of fining him and putting him in prison.

In October of 1938, my father being 60 years old, again he found himself surrounded by serious commercial obligations, that were to fall due at an early date, and he was hoping that, with the affluence of people for the fair that would be celebrated in honour of the Lord of mercy in October, the sales in his business would rise a great deal and thus he would be able to settle the pending accounts. We were all ready to help him in the sales but at the beginning of the novena my sister fell gravely ill. She required immediate surgical intervention, and I had to go with her to Guadalajara. Then my mother also had to take to her bed, and my father was attacked by a serious hepatic condition that made it impossible for him to work on those decisive days. He suffered intensely under the inescapable force that upset all his projects.

Again, Providence intervened in a marvellous way. My sister, tortured by atrocious pains from one moment to the next, and precisely on the day indicated for the operation, was completely cured! The doctor who attended her could do no less than admit the miraculous event. Sometime later we found out that my father had invoked God, asking Him, through the intercession of the Virgin of Guadalupe, to permit my sister to recover her health without the necessity of an operation.

Father continued sick, and we saw him battle with a preoccupation that he could not conceal. On invoking God, he had promised to return to the practices of the Catholic religion, but the devil continued overwhelming him with remnants of human respect and thus impeding his fulfilling the word he had pledged. Nevertheless, we were convinced that the work undertaken by grace would come to a happy end, although not ceasing to pray for it continually.

On November 21 of the same year we heard my father, again suffering the martyrdom of hepatic colic, shout: "Lord of Mercy, free me from this illness I suffer, grant that I may never suffer this pain again, and I promise to return to the faith, to practice my religion!" Immediately he ordered us to send for a priest for him. After having received absolution, with joy and unlimited tenderness, hugging us to his breast, he told us that this was the happiest day of his life. The miracle had happened!

From then on, grace worked without obstacles. With the greatest humility my father again studied his catechism, and he led the rosary at home and attended Holy Mass daily, thus crushing everything left of human respect. His irascible character became gentle to the point of meekness, and he practiced Christian virtues to an almost heroic degree. God reigned in that soul he loved so much and that He attracted by the way of the cross, the sorrowful way, the one way that leads to Love.

Two years after his conversion, and without again having felt that lacerating pain that he feared so much, in full use of his mental faculties and with his soul matured for Heaven, he returned to the bosom of the Father. On receiving Viaticum, he remained suspended for some moments and assured us that the Blessed Virgin was at his side! All had been consummated within the loving and providential plan that governs our lives.

Again, in the convent, I have decided to publish all the above to give thanks to the Sacred Heart—in fulfilment of what I once promised—for the miracle that His grace deigned to realize in the bosom of my family.

- María Concepción Zúñiga López

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